



Pile Burning in Winter 2023-2024

With the arrival of winter weather conditions, Carson National Forest fire crews are planning to conduct pile burning across the forest.

Piles were created from thinning projects in nearly a dozen locations.

Timing

The exact timing of each project will depend on weather, site conditions and available personnel.

Fire managers are monitoring weather and conditions for opportunities to implement each pile burn project during the winter weather season. As potential opportunities arise, public information officers will make notifications.

Locations

Numerous locations are currently planned; however, acres and locations may change. The following are planned near:

- **Canjilon:** Over 200 acres within the Canjilon Wildland Urban Interface Project.
- **El Rito:** Over 300 acres within the El Rito Canyon Restoration Project in Rio Arriba County.
- **Hopewell Lake:** Continuing work from February 2023, over 500 acres east of the lake.
- **Las Trampas:** 160 acres east of the community.
- **Ojo Sarco:** 137 acres to the south of the community.
- **Red River:** 50 acres outside the Enchanted Forest Cross Country Ski Area.
- **San Cristobal:** Around 800 acres within the Kiowa-San Cristobal Wildland Urban Interface Project.
- **Hwy. 150 and Taos Ski Valley:** About 400 acres within the Highway 150 Wildland

Urban Interface Project and the resort's special use permit area.

- **Tres Piedras:** Around 500 acres within the Rio Tusas-Lower San Antonio Landscape Restoration Project.

Acres represent the area thinned to produce piles.



Pile burning at Taos Ski Valley in October 2023. Forest Service photo by Zach Behrens

What is Pile Burning?

Pile burning treats slash, like thin branches, piled by thinning crews. This work is often complemented by members of the public who obtain permits to gather fuelwood in recently thinned areas.

Thinning is applied for different reasons in different areas:

- In vegetation communities, like ponderosa pine, lightning-caused wildfires were historically frequent and low-intensity. Thinning is used in these areas to reduce unnaturally dense fuels to lay the groundwork for understory burning or lightning –caused wildfires later.
- In other vegetation communities, like piñon woodlands and spruce-fir, lightning-caused wildfire were historically infrequent and high-intensity. Thinning is strategically placed near the wildland urban interface to moderate fire behavior and create defensible space for homes, communities and critical infrastructure, among other values that could be threatened.

It is ideal to pile burn after winter weather conditions have set in. The dampened or snow-covered forest floor reduces the chances a fire creeps away from the pile.



Pile burning near Hopewell Lake in February 2023. Forest Service photo by Zach Behrens.

The Big Picture

Thinning and prescribed fire are two of the most important tools of the **Wildfire Crisis Strategy** to promote healthier forests and reduce the risks of wildfire. Planned pile burning in the Carson National Forest will contribute to major landscape projects across the forest.

Enchanted Circle Landscape

Project work on the forest's east side is within the Enchanted Circle Landscape, which covers 1.5 million acres in and around the Camino Real and Questa ranger districts. It is one of the most at-risk landscapes in the country and a priority of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

Rio Chama Project

Work on the forest's west side is within the Rio Chama Collaborative Forest Restoration Landscape Project, which covers the Canjilon, El Rito and Tres Piedras ranger districts and areas outside the forest in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. It aims to protect communities while improving forest health in the Rio Chama and Rio Grande watersheds that are inextricably linked to the water needs of downstream cities, including in Santa Fe and Albuquerque.

Get Notified

The public can get pile burning notices through a variety of means:

- Forest neighbors and residents are encouraged to join the forest news release email list. Email mailroom_r3_carson@usda.gov with a request.
- Forest visitors are encouraged to check the Alerts & Closures page on the Carson National Forest website (fs.usda.gov/carson) or InciWeb (inciweb.nwcg.gov) before heading out.
- Prescribed fire notices are also posted to forest social media (@Carson NF on Facebook and X) and New Mexico Fire Information (nmfireinfo.com).

Have Questions?

The public affairs team is available to assist with questions. Call 575-758-6303.